

Narada Bhakti Sutra



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Narada Bhakti Sutra

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Editor's note

This is a recension of the Doctrine of Devotion or Bhakti in the light of Theosophy excerpted from C.A. Bartzokas (*Comp. & Ed.*). *Compassion: The Spirit of Truth*, Gwynnydd: Philaletheians UK, 2005; v. 05.88.2021, our first Major Work, where:

- The esoteric character of Nārada is sketched out (*pp.* 155-59);
- The triune hypostasis of Bhakti is unravelled as Divine, Worldly, and Devotional Love (*pp.* 160-62);
- Nārada's aphorisms on Bhakti are set side by side with Krishna's precepts to Arjuna (*pp.* 163-84).

In this edition, the numbers correspond to Nārada's first 81 aphorisms.¹ Text in square brackets and footnotes are ours. Titles of frequently quoted works are here abridged; they are fully listed at the end of the *Compassion* book.

A barebones students' edition in small print and without footnotes, which can be printed on both sides of A4 paper, is provided at the end of this document.

Students may also wish to read "The Story of Nārada and the Supremacy of Bhakti," being selections from the *Shrimad Bhāgavatam*. This can be found in the same series.

RICHARD SLUSSER
Series Editor



¹ Aphorisms 82-84 are not directly related to Bhakti.

Narada Bhakti Sutra

1. O Lanoo, listen to the Voice of the Heart Doctrine.

- 1 Now, therefore, I shall try to explain the meaning of *Bhakti*.
- 2 *Bhakti* is, indeed, the highest state of [Devotional] Love of *This*¹ [asmin].
- 3 It is the very essence of the Ocean of Immortality [amrita].²
- 4 Upon reaching *Bhakti*, one becomes consummate, omnipotent [siddha],³ immortal, self-satisfied.
- 5 Upon attaining *Bhakti*, one disengages from [the primordial Opposing Forces of] pleasure and pain, attraction and repulsion, love and hate; and can no longer take delight in, or feel passionate about, worldly affairs.
- 6 Upon experiencing *Bhakti*, one becomes elated yet silent; and, at times, totally engrossed in the bliss of the Supreme Self [atman].⁴

2. Give it all away or you will lose it.

- 7 *Bhakti* cannot be motivated by lustful desire because [it can only be accomplished by] the elimination of [selfishness itself, which is the sum total of all personal] desires.
- 8 Self-renunciation [does not imply] abandoning [daily affairs such as] secular and sacred activities [but offering them instead to *That* or, much better, to Humanity].
- 9 Single-minded Devotion to *That* [tasmin] precludes anything antagonistic to *That* [which could hamper *Bhakti* unfolding].
- 10 Single-hearted Devotion calls for [self-reliance and hence] the abandonment of all [external] support.⁵
- 11 Indifference to situations that are incompatible with Devotion should not exclude those secular and sacred activities that can awaken Devotion.

¹ i.e., Supreme Lord.

² Or elixir of divine life. Cf. "THE ROOT OF LIFE WAS IN EVERY DROP OF THE OCEAN OF IMMORTALITY (*Amrita*) . . ." *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 69 & fn. [Stanza III.6.]

³ Cf. "The Pali word *Iddhi*, is the synonym of the Sanskrit *Siddhis*, or psychic faculties, the abnormal powers in man. There are two kinds of *Siddhis*. One group which embraces the lower, coarse, psychic and mental energies; the other is one which exacts the highest training of Spiritual powers." *Voice of the Silence*, frag. I, note 1 to vs. 1 p. 1; p. 73 in glos. of Chinese & Centenary eds.

⁴ Cf. "But love toward the eternal and infinite thing feeds the mind with a joy entirely exempt from sadness." Spinoza: *The Emendation of the Intellect*, etc., 10. In: Curley E. (Tr. & Ed.). *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Vol. I, Princeton: University Press, 1985

⁵ Cf. fn. 5 p. 179

- 12 [Meanwhile] one should continue observing secular injunctions, even after Devotion has been firmly established [because of their protective effect].
- 13 Otherwise, there is every possibility that one will backslide.
- 14 Social responsibilities should be observed only to the extent [that custom and practice require]; but [activities necessary to physical health, such as] eating [and dressing, for example] should be maintained for life.

3. Let your life become an example to unbelievers.

- 15 [The main] features of *Bhakti*, according to various authorities [rishis], will be now stated.
- 16 Vyasa says that *Bhakti* may be indicated by the ardour of reverence and respect of *That*.
- 17 Garga says that *Bhakti* may be expressed by listening with affection to talks¹ about the glory, greatness, and so on, of *That*.
- 18 Shandilya says that *Bhakti* may be perceived by one's unhindered delight [when basking] in the Universal Self [atman].
- 19 Nārada says that *Bhakti* requires dedication of every [thought and] deed to *That*; and [forewarned of] extreme mental distress if *That* were to be forgotten even for a moment.
- 20 Typical examples of *Bhakti* [from the *Bhagavata-Purana*] will now be given.²
- 21 The pure and impassioned love of the cowmaids [gopis] of Vraja [for Krishna, is a well-known illustration of *Bhakti*].
- 22 Even in their fervent love [of the gopis for an avataric appearance], the greatness of the object of their Devotion should always be remembered to ward off reproach.³
- 23 Had they not been aware [of Krishna's greatness], their love could have been debased to that of a paramour.
- 24 For, in the false Devotion [of profane love] lovers are preoccupied with their own happiness and not with that of their paramour.

¹ Cf. "Śrāvaka (*Sk.*) *Lit.*, 'The who causes to hear'; a preacher. But in Buddhism it denotes a disciple or chela" (*Theosophical Glossary*) . . . "a listener, or student who attends to the religious instructions. From the root 'Shru.' When from theory they go into practice or performance of asceticism, they become *Shramanas*, 'exercisers,' from *Shrama*, action. As Hardy shows, the two appellations answer to the words *ακουστικοι* and *ασκηται* of the Greeks." (*Voice of the Silence*, frag. III, note 86 to vs. 197, p. 45; p. 73 in glos. of Chinese & Centenary eds.) Also cf. *ακουσις*, oral instruction in Pythagoras' School (Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 18.82, etc.); *ακουσματικός*, eager to hear, re: probationers of the same School (*ibid.*, 18.81, etc.); *φιληκοος*, fond of hearing discourses (Isocrates 1.18, *et alia*), but also fond of hearing for mere pastime, *opp. οι φιλομαθουντες* (Polybius, *Fragmenta* 7.7.8).

² Cf. "Nārada . . . cites the example of the Gopis, the shepherdesses of Brindavan, and their love for Krishna. One may say that this example is prehistoric. But many historical exemplars can be found among the followers of all religions, and they also exist today." *Nārada's Way of Divine Love*, p. 59

³ Cf. "The truth taught here is that just as by watering the root of the tree, the branches are also nourished, so by pleasing the Lord, who dwells in the hearts of all, all beings are pleased." *ibid.*, p. 63

4. True life can only be found through Devotion to All.

- 25 [The Path of *Bhakti*] is far superior to
- [1] Karman [Path of Action],
- [2] Jnanam [Path of Knowledge], and
- [3] Yoga [of Patanjali or Path of Mystical Contemplation].
- 26 [As every sincere effort nurtures the devotional impulse], the fruit of such effort heightens Devotion [in the Path of *Bhakti* and all Spiritual Paths].
- 27 [*Bhakti* is superior to other Paths] on account of the Supreme Lord's [ishvara]¹ distaste for selfishness² and love of humbleness.³
- 28 [Some Teachers⁴ say that] Jnanam or inner knowledge alone is the means for arousing *Bhakti*.
- 29 [Others say that] Jnanam and *Bhakti* are interdependent.
- 30 But the son of Brahmā [Nārada] says that *Bhakti* is its own fruit.
- 31 [The catalytic power of *Bhakti* can be illustrated by how one feels at the] sight of a royal palace, dinner, and so on.
- 32 One can neither please the king [who bestows grace and favours upon his subjects⁵ by knowing about him, or merely] by admiring his palace, nor relieve the pangs of hunger by looking at dinner [unless one's innermost perceptions have been enlightened by Devotional Love].
- 33 Therefore, the Path of *Bhakti* alone should be adopted by those who yearn to be freed from the bonds and limitations of matter [and, not least, their terrestrial manas].⁶

¹ Self-existent Lordliness (Logos) among the mystic philosophers of India; in one sense "the divine Self seen by self." Cf. *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 591 fn. & *Mahatma Letter* 59 (111) p. 338; 3rd Combined ed.

² Cf. "Those are the noblest persons who, giving up self-interest, bring about the good of others; those that undertake a business for the sake of others, not inconsistent with their own good, are men of the middle order; those that stand in the way of the good of others for their own benefit are demons in a human form; but we know not what to call them [lit. who they are] that oppose the good of others without any advantage to themselves." Bhartrhari: *Niti Shataka*, 74 (tr. Kale)

³ Cf. "I have three precious things, which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal, and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others, and you can become a leader among men." *Sayings of Lao Tzu*, "Lowliness and Humility," p. 35 (tr. Giles). Full text in our Living the Life Series.

⁴ Acharyas or Teachers of Ethics.

⁵ In other words, without *Bhakti* energising and consecrating the allegiance of subjects to their Inner Ruler and Sovereign, neither the King nor those who may profit from His grace and favours are truly satisfied. The King or Inner Ruler is Ennoia (Designing Thought) or Atman; his subjects, the Lost or Wandering Sheep or Helena. Cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (COMMENTARY ON THE PISTIS-SOPHIA) XIII p. 41

⁶ Or māyāvic upādhi.

5. With subdued heart place all thy works on Me.

- 34 Teachers of Ethics [acharyas] have described certain [mental] processes¹ that can elicit *Bhakti*.
- 35 *Bhakti* can be called forth:
- [1] by letting go of sensual gratifications of any kind [including personal desires and interests];
- [2] by progressive detachment from mundane pursuits [whether material or mental].²
- 36 [3] by continuous adoration of *That* [uttered in deeds of altruistic service to all beings].
- 37 [4] by hearing³ and singing the glory of the Lord [bhagavat]⁴ while still living in the [manifested] world [and for the world].
- 38 [5] by the Compassion [kripa]⁵ of the Mahatmans [Great Souls] in the first place; and
- [6] by the Compassion of the Lord [bhagavat] to a lesser degree.
- 39 It is exceptionally difficult for one to come into contact with Mahatmans. [Their benevolent embrace of the world is subtle and inscrutable. But if contact is established] Their influence becomes unerringly effective.⁶
- 40 [Association with a Mahatman] can be accomplished only by the Compassion [kripa] of *That*.
- 41 Since there is no real difference between the Lord and His devotees [*Bhakti* can be aroused through either].

¹ In ancient scriptures, songs of praise, heroic poems, etc.

² Cf. "Sri Ramakrishna used to refer to [the objects of sense] as worldliness, and worldliness he would define as 'lust and greed.'" *Nārada's Way of Divine Love*, p. 81

³ See *fn.* to *aph.* 17 above.

⁴ The Lord, literally. A title of Buddha and Krishna. (Cf. *Theosophical Glossary*: Bhagavat.) Krishna is a personification of Logos.

⁵ Kripa means Mercy or Grace, *i.e.*, the All-embracing Love and Kindness, Logos' boundless Compassion for All. Not some kind of divine amnesty of karmic debts which will have to be settled in full sooner or later. As Master M. observed in a letter to W.Q. Judge, even "Ātma is Karma." *Echoes of the Orient*, I p. lvi. See *where* H.P. Blavatsky posits Grace:

"Grace (*χαρις*) is a difficult word to translate. It corresponds to the higher aspect of Ākāśa. The two aspects are as follows:

Spiritual Plane: Alaya (Soul of Universe); Ākāśa.

Psychic Plane: Prakriti (Matter or Nature); Astral Light or Serpent."

Blavatsky Collected Writings, (NOTES ON THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN) XI p. 490. Full text in our Secret Doctrine's First Proposition Series.

Also cf. "In its general sense, *Ishvara* means 'Lord' [implying self-existent lordliness]; but the *Ishvara* of the mystic philosophers of India was understood precisely as the union and communion of men with the Deity of the Greek mystics. *Ishvara-Prasada* means literally, in Sanskrit, *grace*. Both of the *Mimamsas*, treating of the most abstruse questions, explain *Karma* as merit, or the *efficacy of works*; *Ishvara-Prasada*, as grace; and *Śrāddha*, as faith." *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 591 *fn.*

⁶ Cf. ". . . those who act up to Their teaching and live the life of which They are the best exemplars, will never be abandoned by Them and will always find Their beneficent help whenever needed, whether obviously or invisibly." *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (WHY I DO NOT RETURN TO INDIA) XII p. 161

42 Try, try to live for the Supernal Lord and His living manifestations [by humanitarian service through self-denial].¹

6. Rise above the trappings of personal life.

43 Evil company should be shunned.²

44 Because it gives rise to lust, anger, delusion, memory loss, discrimination loss and, at long last, total loss [of one's "Infinite Potency born from the concealed Potentiality"].³

45 Spreading like ripples [at first], evil company swells vices [to large-scale waves] in an ocean of misery.

46 Who crosses over the ocean of illusion [mayam]?

Who overcomes illusion?

[1] One who severs all ties with the material world;

[2] One who is devoted to the Mahatmans [and Their Beloved Humanity];

[3] One who is free from [the dire heresy of separateness,⁴ brought about by false self-identity and] self-importance.

47 [4] One who lives in solitude and silence;

47 [5] One who extirpates mundane attachments;

[6] One who is no longer limited by Nature's three qualities [gunas, *i.e.*, purity, passionate activity, and ignorance or darkness];

[7] One who [having renounced I-ness and Me-ness] is no longer subservient to gain, anxiety, and fear.

48 [8] One who, though devoted to [principled] action, lets go the fruits of action;

[9] One who [no longer distracted by self and selfishness] lives for others;

48 [10] One who transcends the Opposing Forces [of the material world].

¹ As outlined in *aph.* 35-38 above. Cf.

O love, my love! If I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring, —
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope.
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *Lovesight*, Sonnet III towards "The House of Life"

² Cf. On the other hand, "good company removes the dullness of intellect, infuses truth into speech, bestows great honour, removes sin, purifies the heart, and spreads fame in all directions; say what it does not secure for men." Bhartrhari: *Niti Shataka*, 23 (*tr.* Kale)

³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. II) XII p. 552; [on the Universal Principle, being Simon's summit of all manifested creation, *i.e.*, Fire or *Иуп.*]

⁴ *Voice of the Silence*, frag. I vs. 37 p. 9. Or "Attavāda, the heresy of the belief in Soul or rather in the separateness of Soul or *Self* from the One Universal, infinite SELF." *ibid.*, frag. I, note 8 to vs. 17 p. 4; p. 74 in glos. of Chinese & Centenary eds.

49 [11] One who brushes aside even the Vedas [when overwhelmed by the fervour of true Devotion];

[12] One who transmutes Devotion into an unalloyed influx of love [of Humanity].

50 He [who having crossed over the ocean of illusion] helps the rest of the world [by example, by deeds of mercy and kindness to all living beings and, finally, by renouncing the liberation itself,¹ which is the ultimate sacrifice].²

7. Feel the Great Heart within.

51 The [transcendental] nature of *Bhakti* cannot be described.

52 Like the taste of a mute.

53 At times *Bhakti* wells up [spontaneously] in the heart of those who are [mentally and ethically] fit.

54 *Bhakti* is true love,

[1] unsullied by matter, innocent of desires, an ever-expanding continuum:

54 [2] a subtle form of [exalted] consciousness.

55 Having reached *That* [in the primary stage of *Bhakti*],³ one looks only at *That*, hears only *That*, speaks only of *That*, and thinks only of *That*.

56 The secondary stage of *Bhakti* [gauni] is threefold, according to one's predominant inclination [*i.e.*, *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*]; and [fourfold, according to] motivation.⁴

57 Each preceding stage [of secondary *Bhakti*] is nobler than the succeeding one.⁵

¹ Cf. "Still greater he, in whom the Self Divine has slain the very knowledge of desire." *Voice of the Silence*, frag. II vs. 167 p. 38

² Cf. "Nirvanas, gained and lost from boundless pity and compassion for the world of deluded mortals." *ibid.*, vs. 187 p. 42; [on the "Secret Way" leading to Parinirvānic bliss.]

³ *i.e.*, the highest stage of *Bhakti*, where devotee, devotion, and object of devotion merge into One.

⁴ *i.e.*, "Four classes of men who work righteousness worship me, O Arjuna; those who are afflicted, the searchers for truth, those who desire possessions, and the wise . . ." *Bhagavad-Gita* 7 vs. 16

⁵ This aphorism is an elaboration of the previous one, ranking *gunas* according to their spiritual potential, *i.e.*, *sattva* is more ennobling than *rajas*, and *rajas* more than *tamas*.

8. With unfettered mind throw every deed on Me.

58 *Bhakti* [or Path of Renunciation] is easier and far more effective than any other Path.

59 Because:

[1] *Bhakti* needs no validation from external authorities. It is Authority itself; its outcome is evidence and proof;

60 [2] *Bhakti* is the paradigm of supreme peace [shanti] and bliss [ananda, both beyond the sight of the profane].

61 Having irrevocably committed social and religious duties to the Lord [in addition to one's own self], one should no longer worry about possible losses or privations; [as self has been surrendered, it can no longer be affected by external conditions.]¹

62 Even after *Bhakti* is attained, one should not abandon [undischarged] worldly duties and obligations, the fruits of which should, in any case, be offered to the Lord. [Moreover, ennobling activities such as] public-spirited service to the community² should continue [or begin, if one has not already exercised mind and body in this direction].

63 One should not listen to stories about [men], women, wealth, and unbelievers.

64 Self-conceit, arrogance, and other [assertions of I-ness] should be corrected.

65 Having dedicated to *That* [one's self and] actions, [any unmastered vices that may persist, such as unfulfilled] desires, anger, pride, and so on, should be directed to *That* alone.³

66 Upon breaking through the [secondary or lower] threefold stage of *Bhakti*,⁴ consciousness begins rising to a [primary or] higher stage, where one's mood is [similar to] that of a servant devoted to his master; or a lover to her beloved.

¹ Cf. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (*Matthew* vi, 26 KJV) "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you." (*Luke* xii, 29-31 KJV) Also cf. *Psalms* xxxiii, 10; tr. Brenton

² And the wider duties of care for the wellbeing of humanity at large.

³ Instead of discharging such unruly emotions outwardly. Because *we are That*, directing resentment or frustrations toward *That* is like talking to ourselves, "thinking aloud" so to speak; there is not anyone else to overhear. Thus the mind can be unburdened without shouting at fellow travellers along the same path, holding them responsible for our own failings and accruing bad karman in the process. Those indoctrinated to fear their imaginary "god" may denounce this aphorism as impious, to say the least. But, in truth, *That* is not only our only friend, It is our best friend (cf. *Gita* 4 vs. 3). It will never let us down, betray us, or behave in the way we do towards each other. And even if It does not appear to respond in ways that we are accustomed to, It understands better than we ever will the human condition and will help us overcome these early difficulties. Moreover, pent-up frustrations vented toward *That* will over time strengthen the bond between the two selves so that lower can be raised by the higher, as *The Voice of the Silence* points out. That is another advantage of *Bhakti*.

⁴ Cf. *aph.* 56 above.

- 67 Those staunch and utterly committed devotees [whose consciousness dwells in primary *Bhakti*] are the Lord's dearest servants.
- 68 Conversing with each other [about the Lord's attributes] with throats choked [with emotion], hair standing on end, and tears flowing, they purify society and the Earth itself.¹
- 69 They sanctify places of pilgrimage, glorify action with virtue, impart authority to scriptures.
- 70 They live [and move, and have their being] in *That* [and *That* lives through them].
- 71 Their forefathers rejoice, resplendent celestial beings [devatah] dance in joy, and even the Earth² feels the protecting love of the new Masters.³
- 72 [They have risen] above [the myriads of] distinctions [and discrimination] of appearance, birth, class, creed, culture, family, occupation, wealth, and so on.
- 73 They and the Lord are One. [For though men appear different from each other, their inmost essence is *That*.]

9. Intoxicate yourself with the right attitude and ethic.

- 74 One should not be drawn into argumentative [and often cynical] discussions [about *That*].
- 75 Because [such disputations tend to] entangle minds in a web of uncertainty and doubt, without enabling them to reach valid conclusions [about *That*].
- 76 One should [earnestly study and] ponder upon the scriptures of *Bhakti*;⁴ and heed their precepts.
- 77 While one is patiently waiting to be released from the clutches of pleasure and pain, gain and loss,⁵ not even a fraction of a second should be wasted [without making an effort to relieve suffering everywhere].⁶

¹ Cf. *fn.* to *aph.* 71 on next page.

² Which is ensouled. Cf. "Kepler on the Soul of the Earth" in our Mystic Verse and Insights Series.

³ Cf. "Know, Conqueror of Sins, once that a Sovani hath cross'd the seventh Path, all Nature thrills with joyous awe and feels subdued. The silver star now twinkles out the news to the night-blossoms, the streamlet to the pebbles ripples out the tale; dark ocean-waves will roar it to the rocks surf-bound, scent-laden breezes sing it to the vales, and stately pines mysteriously whisper:

'A Master has arisen, a MASTER OF THE DAY.'

Voice of the Silence, frag. III vs. 281 p. 65

⁴ Specially the *Bhagavata-Purana*.

⁵ Marked by a turning point, a veritable *μετανοια* (metanoia), when pure reason begins stirring the heart. See ch. 8, § "Merge your self in Self," p. 306, *fn.* 5.

⁶ Cf. "Let not the fierce Sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer's eye." *Voice of the Silence*, frag. I vs. 60 p. 14

- 78 One should actively foster and further harmlessness [ahimsa],¹ truthfulness [satya], cleanliness [sauca], compassion [daya], faith [astikya], and other virtues.
- 79 Those who [bolstered by faith and self-discipline] have no more [personal] cares and worries, should remember and worship the Lord at all times [by loving thoughts and deeds towards All] with all their heart.
- 80 When thus adored and revered, the Lord [sah] reveals his inmost nature to his devotees so that they can see Him as He truly is.²
- 81 [Men and women bound together in one spiritual solidarity of] thought, deed, and devotion to [the infinite Spirit of] Truth is the Greatest Love [a most precious boon, and the most dear to the Lord].



¹ Dynamic compassion.

² And His devotees will then realise the awesome truth, as Hanuman did when asked by Rama who he was:
When I think of myself as an embodied being, I am your servant. When I think of myself as an individual soul, I am part of you. But when I realise "I am Atman," I am one with you.

Narada Bhakti Sutra on two pages

A barebones edition for reflection

1. O Lanoo, listen to the Voice of the Heart Doctrine

Now, therefore, I shall try to explain the meaning of Bhakti.

Bhakti is, indeed, the highest state of [Devotional] Love of This [asmin].

It is the very essence of the Ocean of Immortality [amrita].

Upon reaching Bhakti, one becomes consummate, omnipotent [siddha], immortal, self-satisfied.

Upon attaining Bhakti, one disengages from [the primordial Opposing Forces of] pleasure and pain, attraction and repulsion, love and hate; and can no longer take delight in, or feel passionate about, worldly affairs.

Upon experiencing Bhakti, one becomes elated yet silent; and, at times, totally engrossed in the bliss of the Supreme Self [atman].

2. Give it all away or you will lose it

Bhakti cannot be motivated by lustful desire because [it can only be accomplished by] the elimination of [selfishness itself, which is the sum total of all personal] desires.

Self-renunciation [does not imply] abandoning [daily affairs such as] secular and sacred activities [but offering them instead to That or, much better, to Humanity].

Single-minded Devotion to That [tasmin] precludes anything antagonistic to That [which could hamper Bhakti unfolding].

Single-hearted Devotion calls for [self-reliance and hence] the abandonment of all [external] support.

Indifference to situations that are incompatible with Devotion should not exclude those secular and sacred activities that can awaken Devotion.

[Meanwhile] one should continue observing secular injunctions, even after Devotion has been firmly established [because of their protective effect].

Otherwise, there is every possibility that one will backslide.

Social responsibilities should be observed only to the extent [that custom and practice require]; but [activities necessary to physical health, such as] eating [and dressing, for example] should be maintained for life.

3. Let your life become an example to unbelievers

[The main] features of Bhakti, according to various authorities [rishis], will be now stated.

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Garga says that Bhakti may be expressed by listening with affection to talks about the glory, greatness, and so on, of That.

Shandilya says that Bhakti may be perceived by one's unhindered delight [when basking] in the Universal Self [atman].

Narada says that Bhakti requires dedication of every [thought and] deed to That; and [forewarned of] extreme mental distress if That were to be forgotten even for a moment.

Typical examples of Bhakti [from the Bhagavata-Purana] will now be given.

The pure and impassioned love of the cowmaids [gopis] of Vraja [for Krishna, is a well-known illustration of Bhakti].

Even in their fervent love [of the gopis for an avatic appearance], the greatness of the object of their Devotion should always be remembered to ward off reproach.

Had they not been aware [of Krishna's greatness], their love could have been debased to that of a paramour.

For, in the false Devotion [of profane love] lovers are preoccupied with their own happiness and not with that of their paramour.

4. True life can only be found through Devotion to All

[The Path of Bhakti] is far superior to

(a) Karman [Path of Action],

(b) Jnanam [Path of Knowledge], and

(c) Yoga [of Patanjali or Path of Mystical Contemplation].

[As every sincere effort nurtures the devotional impulse], the fruit of such effort heightens Devotion [in the Path of Bhakti and all Spiritual Paths].

[Bhakti is superior to other Paths] on account of the Supreme Lord's [ishvara] distaste for selfishness and love of humbleness.

[Some Teachers say that] Jnanam or inner knowledge alone is the means for arousing Bhakti.

[Others say that] Jnanam and Bhakti are interdependent.

But the son of Brahmā [Narada] says that Bhakti is its own fruit.

[The catalytic power of Bhakti can be illustrated by how one feels at the] sight of a royal palace, dinner, and so on.

One can neither please the king [who bestows grace and favours upon his subjects by knowing about him, or merely] by admiring his palace, nor relieve the pangs of hunger by looking at dinner [unless one's innermost perceptions have been enlightened by Devotional Love].

Therefore, the Path of Bhakti alone should be adopted by those who yearn to be freed from the bonds and limitations of matter [and, not least, their terrestrial manas].

5. With subdued heart place all thy works on Me

Teachers of Ethics [acharyas] have described certain [mental] processes that can elicit Bhakti.

Bhakti can be called forth

(a) by letting go of sensual gratifications of any kind [including personal desires and interests];

(b) by progressive detachment from mundane pursuits [whether material or mental].

(c) by continuous adoration of That [uttered in deeds of altruistic service to all beings].

(d) by hearing and singing the glory of the Lord [bhagavat] while still living in the [manifested] world [and for the world].

(e) by the Compassion [kripa] of the Mahatmans [Great Souls] in the first place; and

(f) by the Compassion of the Lord [bhagavat] to a lesser degree.

It is exceptionally difficult for one to come into contact with Mahatmans. [Their benevolent embrace of the world is subtle and inscrutable. But if contact is established] Their influence becomes unerringly effective.

[Association with a Mahatman] can be accomplished only by the Compassion [kripa] of That.

Since there is no real difference between the Lord and His devotees [Bhakti can be aroused through either].

Try, try to live for the Supernal Lord and His living manifestations [by humanitarian service through self-denial].

6. Rise above the trappings of personal life

Evil company should be shunned.

Because it gives rise to lust, anger, delusion, memory loss, discrimination loss and, at long last, total loss [of one's "Infinite Potency born from the concealed Potentiality"].

Spreading like ripples [at first], evil company swells vices [to large-scale waves] in an ocean of misery.

Who crosses over the ocean of illusion [mayam]?

Who overcomes illusion?

One who severs all ties with the material world;

One who is devoted to the Mahatmans [and Their Beloved Humanity];

One who is free from [the dire heresy of separateness, brought about by false self-identity and] self-importance.

One who lives in solitude and silence;

One who extirpates mundane attachments;

One who is no longer limited by Nature's three qualities [gunas, i.e., purity, passionate activity, and ignorance or darkness];

One who [having renounced I-ness and Me-ness] is no longer subservient to gain, anxiety, and fear.

One who, though devoted to [principled] action, lets go the fruits of action;

One who [no longer distracted by self and selfishness] lives for others;

One who transcends the Opposing Forces [of the material world].

One who brushes aside even the Vedas [when overwhelmed by the fervour of true Devotion];

One who transmutes Devotion into an unalloyed influx of love [of Humanity].

He [who having crossed over the ocean of illusion] helps the rest of the world [by example, by deeds of mercy and kindness to all living beings and, finally, by renouncing the liberation itself, which is the ultimate sacrifice].

7. Feel the Great Heart within

The [transcendental] nature of Bhakti cannot be described.

Like the taste of a mute.

At times Bhakti wells up [spontaneously] in the heart of those who are [mentally and ethically] fit.

Bhakti is true love,

(a) unsullied by matter, innocent of desires, an ever-expanding continuum;

(b) a subtle form of [exalted] consciousness.

Having reached That [in the primary stage of Bhakti], one looks only at That, hears only That, speaks only of That, and thinks only of That.

The secondary stage of Bhakti [gauni] is threefold, according to one's predominant inclination [i.e., sattva, rajas, tamas]; and [fourfold, according to] motivation.

Each preceding stage [of secondary Bhakti] is nobler than the succeeding one.

8. With unfettered mind throw every deed on Me

Bhakti [or Path of Renunciation] is easier and far more effective than any other Path.

Because:

(a) Bhakti needs no validation from external authorities. It is Authority itself; its outcome is evidence and proof;

(b) Bhakti is the paradigm of supreme peace [shanti] and bliss [ananda, both beyond the sight of the profane].

Having irrevocably committed social and religious duties to the Lord [in addition to one's own self], one should no longer worry about possible losses or privations; [as self has been surrendered, it can no longer be affected by external conditions.]

Even after Bhakti is attained, one should not abandon [undischarged] worldly duties and obligations, the fruits of which should, in any case, be offered to the Lord. [Moreover, ennobling activities such as] public-spirited service to the community should continue [or begin, if one has not already exercised mind and body in this direction].

One should not listen to stories about [men], women, wealth, and unbelievers.

Self-conceit, arrogance, and other [assertions of I-ness] should be corrected.

Having dedicated to That [one's self and] actions, [any unmastered vices that may persist, such as unfulfilled] desires, anger, pride, and so on, should be directed to That alone.

Upon breaking through the [secondary or lower] threefold stage of Bhakti, consciousness begins rising to a [primary or] higher stage, where one's mood is [similar to] that of a servant devoted to his master; or a lover to her beloved.

Those staunch and utterly committed devotees [whose consciousness dwells in primary Bhakti] are the Lord's dearest servants.

Conversing with each other [about the Lord's attributes] with throats choked [with emotion], hair standing on end, and tears flowing, they purify society and the Earth itself.

They sanctify places of pilgrimage, glorify action with virtue, impart authority to scriptures.

They live [and move, and have their being] in That [and That lives through them].

Their forefathers rejoice, resplendent celestial beings [devatah] dance in joy, and even the Earth feels the protecting love of the new Masters.

[They have risen] above [the myriads of] distinctions [and discrimination] of appearance, birth, class, creed, culture, family, occupation, wealth, and so on.

They and the Lord are One. [For though men appear different from each other, their inmost essence is That.]

9. Intoxicate yourself with the right attitude and ethic

One should not be drawn into argumentative [and often cynical] discussions [about That].

Because [such disputations tend to] entangle minds in a web of uncertainty and doubt, without enabling them to reach valid conclusions [about That].

One should [earnestly study and] ponder upon the scriptures of Bhakti; and heed their precepts.

While one is patiently waiting to be released from the clutches of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, not even a fraction of a second should be wasted [without making an effort to relieve suffering everywhere].

One should actively foster and further harmlessness [ahimsa], truthfulness [satya], cleanliness [sauca], compassion [daya], faith [astikya], and other virtues.

Those who [bolstered by faith and self-discipline] have no more [personal] cares and worries, should remember and worship the Lord at all times [by loving thoughts and deeds towards All] with all their heart.

When thus adored and revered, the Lord [sah] reveals his inmost nature to his devotees so that they can see Him as He truly is.

[Men and women bound together in one spiritual solidarity of] thought, deed, and devotion to [the infinite Spirit of] Truth is the Greatest Love [a most precious boon, and the most dear to the Lord]

Suggested reading for students.



From our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.

- A WORTHY LIFE IS A VIRTUOUS LIFE
- ANGELS WEEP AT THE SIGHT OF HUMAN SORROW
- CHELAS AND LAY CHELAS
- CHELASHIP RULES FROM THE KIU-TE
- COMMENTARY ON THE GAYATRI BY JUDGE
- DISCHARGING THE DUTY OF ANOTHER IS DANGEROUS
- DIVINE VS. WORLDLY LOVE
- EYE VS. HEART DOCTRINE
- HARMONY IS THE ONE LAW IN NATURE
- HEART DOCTRINE AND HIGHER ETHICS
- KRISHNA IN PARADISE
- LIGHT ON THE PATH
- LOVE IS THE HEALING POWER OF THE SUCCESSFUL PHYSICIAN
- MAHATMAS AND CHELAS
- PROCLUS ON THE TEACHER-DISCIPLE BOND OF LOVE
- PROTREPTICS TO DEVOTIONAL LOVE IN IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA
- REAL LIFE THRILLS IN THE SEVEN BRAINS OF THE HEART
- SEPTUAGINT'S SONG OF SONGS - TR. BRENTON
- STAND READY TO ABANDON ALL YOU HAVE LEARNED WITH THE HEAD
- THAT PURE DESIRE, OF WHOM LOVE IS BORN
- THE BHAGAVAD GITA - SEVEN ESSAYS BY JUDGE
- THE BHAGAVAD GITA - TR. JUDGE
- THE DEVOTIONAL SONGS OF KABIR SAHEB
- THE LEGEND OF THE BLUE LOTUS
- THE PATH, BY REGINALD WILLOUGHBY MACHELL

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SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- THE PERENNIAL WISDOM OF JAVIDAN KHIRAD
- THE STAR OF LOVE THRILLS THE NOBLE HEART
- THE STORY OF NARADA AND THE SUPREMACY OF BHAKTI
- THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN MAHATMAS ARE MEN LIVING ON EARTH
- THE VERY BEST OF ALL TALISMANS
- THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE - SEVEN MYSTIC SOUNDS
- THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE - TR. BLAVATSKY
- THEOLOGIA GERMANICA - TR. WINKWORTH
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE AMARANTHINE DREAM
- TOWARD THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN
- TRUE PRAYER IS MENTAL UTTERANCE IN SECRET
- WARNINGS TO WOULD-BE OCCULTISTS
- WHEN THE SUN MOVES NORTHWARD

